

State Commission

A priority of the Maine Commission for Community Service (MCCS) is to permanently increase local capacity to engage and effectively support volunteers. In 2015, MCCS conducted five training events for 332 community leaders: CMV 101 is an online 30 hour course for novice managers of volunteers; the state volunteerism conference is a one-day educational program; and the Service Enterprise Trainers network certifies leaders who then work with local agencies to increase efficiency and effectiveness through volunteer engagement. The impact of this training was reflected in these comments: "The Service Enterprise training has made a very significant difference in the way we do work at Heart of Biddeford. It was the time and focus we needed to bump our work to the next level and have volunteers contribute to operating the organization." Another attendee commented, "I found the course immensely valuable, especially the second half. I know this will help, not only in future volunteer management, but some business planning and leadership principles we entrepreneurs can never learn too much about."

AmeriCorps State

In 2015, 1,373 students completed educational programs supported by AmeriCorps members in three programs. At Spruce Mountain High School in the town of Jay, students still struggle to complete their regular courses. To address this issue, the AIMS HIGH program continues credit recovery support to students in the school. Last year, AmeriCorps members had 27 students from April to June in credit recovery programs, including Plato, Springboard English, and Math XL interventions. Of the 27 students, 14 have recovered course credit by the close of the school year, and seven are continuing with credit recovery programs to complete by the end of the summer. The last six students either moved to the alternative education program at Spruce Mountain, or felt confident enough in their progress to retake courses with teachers in the traditional manner. Out of the 14 who completed the program successfully this quarter, four were seniors who finished school and graduated on time. This impact is a direct outcome of AmeriCorps members support to students.

In 2015, AmeriCorps members improved or rehabilitated 143 miles of trails in Maine parks, wilderness areas, and municipal recreational areas. In addition, Maine Conservation Corps AmeriCorps members collaborated with local emergency responders and assisted in the search for a missing hiker in Baxter State Park. Two Maine Conservation Corps AmeriCorps teams worked to cover tough terrain of to locate the missing hiker. Local emergency responders, impressed by the service of the AmeriCorps members, expressed their intent to engage AmeriCorps members in future search efforts.

AmeriCorps National

FoodCorps has 12 AmeriCorps members serving in Bryant Pond, Ellsworth, Gardiner, Liberty, Lincolnville, Machias, Portland, Oxford, Skowhegan, Union, and Waterville. FoodCorps is a nationwide team of AmeriCorps leaders who work under the direction of local partner organizations to connect children to real food and help them grow up healthy. They teach children hands-on lessons about food and nutrition build and tend school gardens, teach cooking lessons, and help change what's on lunch trays so that children can eat healthy food from local farms. In the past year, the FoodCorps members in Maine served 12,383 children, built or brought back into use 27 school and community gardens, harvested 2,715 pounds of produce, and recruited 282 community volunteers.

AmeriCorps VISTA

Goodwill Industries of Northern New England became a new AmeriCorps VISTA partner in early 2015. Their goal is to help move 10,000 people out of poverty and into stability – a perfect fit for VISTA. Goodwill has been operating AmeriCorps programs in Maine for more than 10 years and has a staff that is 100 percent AmeriCorps Alums and 75 percent VISTA Alums. Goodwill recruited and placed 32 VISTA members and 2 VISTA leaders in 28 sites in both rural and urban settings in the most impoverished pockets of the state. One site, Mano en Mano, builds a stronger and more inclusive community in Downeast Maine by working with diverse populations to provide affordable housing and educational opportunities and removing barriers to healthcare and other social services. The AmeriCorps VISTA at that site is creating a bilingual resource guide so that will help Spanish-speaking community members have equal access to essential community resources. She is also developing and putting in place a system of volunteer management so that volunteer interpreters can help with medical appointments and school visits.

The Goodwill VISTA Partnership places AmeriCorps VISTA members throughout the state, including Aroostook County, which has the state's second-highest poverty rate. Aroostook Aspirations Initiative is dedicated to the education, inspiration, and leadership of Aroostook County youth, especially students who are at risk for not completing a college education. The Community Development Coordinator VISTA is working with each school district in Aroostook County to manage the Community Action Team, which made up of students, local businesses, and members of the community. The team identifies opportunities for students to engage in community service, creates opportunities for students to network with businesses in the spirit of service to community, and supports local fundraising to benefit Aroostook Aspirations Initiative. The VISTA is creating and managing several community events and promotes a spirit of service and commitment to Aroostook County. The VISTA has written several blog posts to build awareness of the needs of this community and the mission of the initiative.

AmeriCorps NCCC

An AmeriCorps NCCC team served with Habitat for Humanity-Seven Rivers in Topsham to support their Weatherization and Winterization program. Traditionally, Habitat has helped families leave dangerous and energy-inefficient homes in favor of newer, more sustainable properties. Habitat for Humanity Seven Rivers helps low-income families have homes by building sustainable housing and repairing, weatherizing, and winterizing existing homes. Most of the homeowners that the team's service helped were disabled, elderly, or low-income earners with several dependent children at home. The NCCC team did carpentry, weatherization, and winterization tasks – they caulked, retrofitted insulation, and built winter storm windows. Throughout the project, Habitat emphasized to the members the interconnectedness of heating, structure, appliances, and materials, and helped them understand the unique needs of Maine's rural towns, where the housing stock is among the oldest in the nation.

An AmeriCorps NCCC FEMA Corps team worked with the Maine Cultural Emergency Resource Coalition to help ten cultural institutions across the state build disaster plans. They scheduled meetings, prepared agendas and relevant materials, facilitated discussions about disaster preparedness, and assembled resources and information to build a final disaster binder for each institution. The disaster plans outlined a variety of emergency contacts, floor and evacuation plans for the institutions' facilities, emergency salvage techniques for the institutions' collections, and additional sections according to each location's needs. By the end of the project, the team had completed and presented nine disaster plans, helped the Coalition at their offices in the Maine State Museum, and built a Facebook page for the Coalition's program.

Senior Corps Foster Grandparent Program

The People's Opportunity Alliance Foster Grandparent Program, based in Portland, typically has 110 volunteers who serve 15-35 hours every week in schools and pre-schools. The Foster Grandparents help at-risk youth, and children who are not performing at grade level, with school readiness, reading, and math. In southern Maine in the 2014-15 school year, the volunteers tutored more than 1,200 children. The children's teacher report that 990 improved in literacy, math, and school readiness. Children also report feeling safer at school, happier to attend school, and that learning is more fun because of their Foster Grandparent volunteer. This past year, the program's volunteers, which include 3 veterans, served 25 children who had a parent in prison, 45 abused or neglected children, 205 children with developmental disabilities, 103 children with emotional disabilities, 23 homeless children, 352 children with learning disabilities, and 403 children with language barriers.

Senior Corps RSVP

Aroostook RSVP, sponsored by the Aroostook Area Agency on Aging, covers 6,700 square miles – the largest county east of the Mississippi River. More than 2,770 people (22 percent) of its citizens age 65 and older live at or below 125 percent of the poverty level. Aroostook RSVP's 282 volunteers meet critical needs of people in the county's rural and poor communities. The volunteers prepare and deliver a week's worth of healthy meals to food-insecure older adults, drive people to medical appointments, give companionship and lessen social isolation at Maine Veteran's Home, support 11 food pantries, lead Matter of Balance classes, maintain parks and trails Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge, help with Red Cross disaster response, do VITA tax preparation, and present classes on avoiding fraud and scams that target seniors. In the past year, seven volunteers presented Medicare information in group sessions and one-on-one counseling to 664 people. They helped Medicare recipients understand their options and benefits and helped them enroll in a Medicare Savings Program and Medicaid.

Senior Corps Senior Companion Program

The University of Maine Senior Companion Program is newly sponsored by the UMaine Center on Aging. The Center promotes and organizes education, research and evaluation, and community service activities about aging to support the highest quality of life for older citizens and their families. A 2014 research project concluded that the Senior Companion independent and respite services saved Maine approximately \$4.6 million each year in long-term care expenses, based on average nursing home cost in Maine. In the past year, 105 Senior Companion volunteers gave 73,151 hours of service. Those Senior Companions gave companionship to 373 older citizens, which allowed 80 percent of the clients to stay independent in their homes. In addition, 19 Senior Companions gave 3,071 hours of respite for 37 clients and their caregivers. When they were asked how they make a difference in the lives of their clients, one Senior Companion summed up the general sentiment: they "believe all of my clients are success stories. I am happy to be able to visit with these people and make their lives less lonely."